

JULY 29, 1982

In about the amount of time it'd take me to build a trap fence, Goat Whiskers the Younger set up a modern wagon wheel grazing system that too miles and miles of posts and wires and fancy electric chargers. A South African brought the deal to the country. The date of inception has slipped my mind, but I think I wrote you a report on the seminar that was sponsored by the Sheep and Goat Raisers Assn. For sure other scribes did, so you are bound to know the details.

Anyway, quite a number of these cell systems were built across the Shortgrass Country. Stocking rates were doubled in the wheel-shaped arrangement; the ones of us that disbelieved spent a lot of time trying to find out the results of such a revolutionary plan of range management.

One of Whiskers' units joined our west side. Every time I'd go over there I'd ease down and try to compare the grass between our pasture and the revolving wagon wheel. Often I'd see cattle and sheep in the cells, but never at close range.

Over the radio I quizzed Young Whiskers about the plan. I suspect more to entertain the other subscribers on the channel, Whiskers put on a big act defending his system. It became obvious that if I wanted to know his lamb and calf weights I was either going to have to buy his calves and lambs or start fencing into pie shapes myself.

At the end of the first year I began to notice that our sheep were being affected by the grazing plan. We'd go over to round up the ewes and lambs, and unless we were lucky and caught them drifting in the right direction, the whole herd would come in behind the drive and we'd miss bunches of sheep.

After making a couple of bum roundups, I began to see that our woolies were copying the same rotation movement as the Whiskers herd across the fence. Those old ewes had been watching his cowboys change cells every four or five days and were acting out exactly the same circular pattern without the holding fences.

We not only had trouble rounding them up. When we'd throw a bunch against the fence to get a count, it was impossible to string the ewes out in a straight line. Until we'd get the herd through a gate into another pasture, they'd just keep on trying to go in a big circle. Sheep are hard enough to work without that handicap. Had I thought there was a milligram of mercy left in the courts, I'd have filed suit against Whiskers for alienating and corrupting and running a whole herd of woolies plumb loco.

Cattle adjoining the cells didn't respond like the sheep. Occasionally we'd see an old cow that acted like she had the wobbly-head disease, but I think that was caused from watching pickups going down the highway during the feeding season. Shortgrass cows become so devoted to feeds and feeding that they can't stand much traffic on a road. I really doubt whether they ever caught on to the rotation plan. They are too concerned about all four of their stomachs to notice anything else.

Just last week, Whiskers assured me that nothing was wrong. He claims he's going to have two more systems in operation in a short time. His grass does look good in the low spots. Until I make up my mind what to do, I guess I'd better run straight cattle against Whiskers' outfit, or we'll have an epidemic of dizzy sheep.